

PRESS RELEASE

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Declaration by the European Union on the Middle East

At a time when the situation in the Middle East is extremely serious, we cannot be inactive.

We are convinced that only determined and concerted action by the European Union, the United Nations, the United States and the Russian Federation can help the parties to break the cycle of violence and commit themselves once again to the search for peace. This requires:

- the reaffirmation and full recognition of Israel's irrevocable right to live in peace and security within internationally recognised borders;
- the establishment of a viable and democratic Palestinian State and an end to the occupation of Palestinian territories.

As a first step, the following pledges must be given:

- by the Palestinian Authority: the dismantling of Hamas' and Islamic Jihad's terrorist networks, including the arrest and prosecution of all suspects; a public appeal in Arabic for an end to the armed intifada;
- by the Israeli Government: the withdrawal of its military forces and a stop to extrajudicial executions; the lifting of closures and of all restrictions imposed on the Palestinian people; a freeze on settlements.

On the basis of this EU position and in the light of the discussions which we have had today in Brussels with Mr Shimon Peres and Mr Nabil Chaath, we have asked Javier Solana, S.G. High Representative for the CFSP, to go to the region and report back to the Laeken European Council.

The aim is to contribute, in concertation with the United Nations, the United States and Russia, to a speedy resumption of negotiations, without preliminaries.

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